

**STILLWATER COUNTY
COMMISSIONER MINUTES**

<p>These minutes reflect the proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners. The official minutes are on file with the Clerk and Recorder (MCA 7-4-2611(2)(b)).</p>

SPECIAL AGENDA MEETING

**June 24, 2021
11:00 A.M.**

Present: Commissioners Mark Crago, Chair; Tyrel Hamilton and Steve Riveland, members; Shannon Fisher, Admin;

Others Present: Maureen Wiltshire, Fire Warden; Rich Cowger (via Phone), Nick Jacobs, Columbus Fire & Rescue; John Alegria, Park City Fire Chief; Emily

Regular Business: Stage II Fire Restriction Implementation Meeting – Commissioner Crago opened the meeting with introductions of the Fire Warden and the Columbus Fire & Rescue and Park City Fire members present, and opened the floor to the discussion of potential implementation of Stage 2 Fire Restrictions. Commissioner Crago stated that the Commission had just been on the Fire Restriction Committee Call and that several other counties were in Stage 1 and Stage 2 fire restrictions, he believed that the BLM would be following suit with the County. Commissioner Crago believed that DNRC had beefed up their Stage 1 Restrictions. Fire Warden Maureen Wiltshire corrected him, stating that it was FWP with the new stage 1 restrictions, where they are not allowing Campfires. Commissioner Riveland stated that the Beartooth Ranger District was also in the same modified Stage 1 Restrictions. Commissioner Riveland stated that he would like to hear from the fire chiefs and their thoughts of moving into stage 2. Park City Fire Chief John Alegria stated that he wanted to read what the restrictions were, as he thought we would be following Yellowstone County as we are really dry. Chief Alegria stated that he was ok with moving into stage 2 restrictions, as we have no green on the rims, no rain, and relatively nothing. Columbus Fire & Rescue member Nick Jacobs stated that he has been back and forth on the restrictions, and realizes we should probably go into stage 2, while also knowing that going into stage 2 will have a negative impact on Agriculture in the area. Assistant Fire Chief Jacobs stated that in his opinion in restricting fireworks, you will always have smart people and dumb people, and fireworks will be lit off in dry weather no matter what. Columbus Fire Chief Rich Cowger questioned when the Commission was thinking of implementing stage 2. Commissioner Crago stated that if they were to go into stage 2, they would be going into them sooner rather than later. Commissioner Crago stated that the group could decide on the date of implementation once they get to that point of the process. Chief Cowger stated that he agreed with Assistant Chief Jacobs, that he was undecided of going into stage 2. Chief Cowger detailed the Robinson Draw Fire they were sitting on currently at 30,000 acres, and that none of the restrictions would have impacted that. Chief Cowger believes that the county and Fire stations need to be on the same page, and not have special exemptions issued during the restrictions. Chief Cowger also wanted to verify that the stage 2 Restrictions would be upheld and enforced, as in the past it has been difficult to get the total enforcement of the restrictions. Chief Cowger stated that he is not one hundred percent on board with stage 2, knowing these resource shortages and the latter concerns. Commissioner Riveland stated that he was leaning more towards stage 2 restrictions but that with the previous Fire Restriction

Committee call and the current weather forecast, he would like to hold off until Monday June 28th 11:30 A.M. meeting to see the weather conditions of next week. Chief Cowger stated that he also wanted to be consistent with the restrictions and how they are implementing stage 2, and not to be jumping back and forth between stage 1 and 2. Commissioner Riveland agreed that they are either in it or they aren't, and that needed to be consistent across the board. Commissioner Riveland stated that it is dry and that the 1000-hour fuels right now are at 9% and a lot of rain is not going to help us right now. Chief Cowger agreed not enough rain, and that it would take something close to a Noah's ark type flood to change things. Commissioner Crago stated that he had been in contact with the Stillwater County Sheriff and that he was reviewing the resolution, which Sheriff Kem in an email had stated that previously the department has taken an educational route to enforcing the restrictions and would not be issuing citations, if it did come to that hazardous of a situation, it would be turned over to the County Attorney. Sheriff Kem's email also stated that this is what they do with the current burn permit system and would be following the same for the restrictions, except for the local area exemptions permit, which he recommended should fall to the Fire Warden's duties and that there should be exemptions possible in place for agriculture practices. Sheriff Kem relayed this and that he would not be at the meeting. Commissioner Crago stated that the Fire Warden had been working on a permit form for the Stage 2 restrictions, that would be signed by all parties including the local fire chief, fire warden, and Commissioners. Chief Cowger stated that they did need to be cautious with certain occupations such as agriculture, except those individuals are always out there so he was not as concerned, but those individuals do need to have those restrictions and guidelines in place, possible for a 6 A.M. to 1 P.M. timeframe to not do certain activities, which we can adapt to that, but some of those restrictions do restrict our Fire Prevention Program. Chief Cowger stated that he disagreed with Sheriff Kem, in that his Fire & Rescue members would be doing the educational part and the officers should be enforcing those restrictions. Commissioner Crago stated that he had some residents reach out in the Absarokee area and as well in the Columbus area, and that Commissioner Hamilton had as well received concern from residents in Park City, concerns specifically about fireworks. Commissioner Crago stated that he agreed with both Chief Cowger and Assistant Chief Jacobs, he agreed there needed to be educational out-reach, but that in the end stupid is as stupid does, doesn't matter how well you educate the person not paying attention, won't pay attention. As of the current dry conditions even with the light rain we had yesterday, I am in support of moving into stage 2 Fire Restrictions, but does not need to happen right away and we can evaluate that. Chief Cowger agreed that they were dealing with those dry conditions and that it was not enough rain. Commissioner Riveland stated that his major concern over the next couple of days would be the lightning strikes in these dry conditions. Assistant Chief Jacobs stated his gut told him to not go into stage 2 just yet, as they had time with the fireworks to test and that there were a lot of other people that would be punished due to this Assistant Chief Jacobs stated that he had talked with Ron Walker this morning who explained what they were working on at the Fireworks plant, that they had mowed their grass down, have their little fire truck on site, and will be doing most of their testing in their silo. I believe that people are being responsible, but things happen. Commissioner Crago stated that there still would be the local community fire restrictions call on Monday at 10:30 A.M., and that if the restrictions were not put into place now, sounds like we are on board to do stage 2 whenever. Commissioner Crago confirmed that Chief Alegria was on board with moving into stage 2, due to the dryness, and confirmed that Columbus Fire & Rescue were also on board but would like to give it a little bit of time. Absarokee Fire was also confirmed to be on board, but also hesitant to start right now. Chief Cowger would like everyone to be on the same page in what is going to happen, to prepare and see what that is going to look like in stage 2, and also getting the education out there.

Chief Cowger agreed to reevaluate on Monday and go from there, we are better off not just reacting to the situation, but being prepared. Commissioner Crago stated that it was recorded on June 29, 2012 of going into stage 2 fire restrictions, making it June 29, 2021 for next weeks meeting. Commissioner Crago stated that a placeholder would be on the agenda for the resolution and the restrictions, and that a decision could be made after the community fire restrictions call on Monday. Assistant Chief Jacobs questioned if Yellowstone and Treasurer counties were going into stage 2 and Commissioner Crago confirmed that they would be going into it on Monday June 28, 2021. Commissioner Hamilton stated that he had a citizen from Park City reach out to him about the fireworks at the hill climbs this weekend, but that he knew Assistant Chief Jacobs was in contact with the hill climbs owner and would be monitoring the event, if there was an active fire in the county I would have a different stance, but I think that I am good with regrouping on Monday to reevaluate. Assistant Chief Jacobs questioned whether the state and government were doing the educational media blasts of stay safe, be smart, just giving general fire safety and the BLM is doing something as well he believed, Fire Warden confirmed. Commissioner Riveland agreed that it would be best to reconvene on Monday and make the decision, and reassess, we have our fire departments prepared and we could always change course if needed. Commissioner Crago agreed and suggested that they hold weekly Commission and Fire Warden posted meetings, and if there isn't anything to discuss then that's that, it does seem to be a challenging start to the year. Commissioner Crago again confirmed that everyone was in agreement to meet again on Monday to discuss the decision and make that decision at the agenda meeting. Chief Cowger stated that he had talked with the City Mayor and that they were talking of the city land that was exempt and where fires can be. Commissioner Crago asked if they should invite the mayor and Dennis to next weeks meeting, so that the city and county would be on the same page. Commissioner Hamilton confirmed with Assistant Chief Jacobs that he was ok with having wood burning fires at the hill climbs in the campsites? Assistant Chief Jacobs confirmed that they would monitor if they had fire rings, they are ok, but no intoxicated mess happening, no pallet fires, and there will be a security team running around to monitor. Commissioner Riveland confirmed that they had talked with the organizer of the hill climbs and that they are getting prepared for the conditions.

Public Comments: None Heard

Meeting Adjourned: Hearing no further business, Commissioner Crago adjourned the meeting 11:25 A.M.

APPROVED BY: /s/
Mark Crago, Commissioner Chairman

ATTEST: Heidi L. Stadel, Clerk and Recorder